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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BOGOTA 004129

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PINR](#) [PINS](#) [PTER](#) [PREL](#) [SNAR](#) [MCA](#) [MASS](#) [MARR](#) [ASEC](#)

SUBJECT: COAST GUARD COMMANDANT ADMIRAL COLLINS MEETS WITH  
URIBE

Classified By: Ambassador William B. Wood for reasons 1.4 (b)  
and (d).

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Summary  
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1. (C) Summary: In a meeting with Colombian President Alvaro Uribe and other senior officials, Admiral Thomas Collins, Commandant of the U.S. Coast Guard, praised the Colombian Navy. He noted he hopes to improve already close relations between the two coast guard services, including the possible basing of USCG helicopter assets with sniper platforms for co-use. All agreed on the importance of targeting the large shipments originating on Colombia's Pacific coast, which has long been controlled by illegal armed groups and lacks a significant state presence. President Uribe emphasized that both his government and the USG are under pressure to show increasingly better results in order to keep up public support for their counterdrug policies. End Summary.

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A Good News Story  
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2. (C) On April 20, Admiral Thomas Collins, Commandant of the U.S. Coast Guard, met with Colombian President Alvaro Uribe, Minister of Defense (MOD) Jorge Alberto Uribe, and Navy Commander Admiral Mauricio Soto. Admiral Collins praised the Colombian Navy, noting that the Navy is responsible for 60 percent of all Colombian drug seizures. He credited Admiral Soto with these successes and other improvements in the Navy, and said he hopes to improve already excellent relations between our Coast Guards. Collins noted that the Colombian Navy is missing air power, and said the U.S. Coast Guard is considering basing USCG helicopter assets close in-shore, including use of sniper platforms that can take out the engines of illegal go-fast boats. Presently, the Colombian Navy has only one helicopter active on the Pacific Coast and is only able to use Air Force resources on a limited basis. Other important cooperation projects include intelligence sharing, especially out of the 11-country Joint Task Force in Key West, Florida, professional exchanges, and training opportunities in the U.S. The soon-to-be-implemented international maritime regulation code (ISPS), signed by 108 countries, including Colombia, will significantly increase port controls and be a powerful tool against shipments of drugs, arms, and other illegal goods.

3. (C) In the vulnerable Pacific "littoral zone," which has little or no state presence, traffickers send the largest drug shipments. Soto said that the Navy already has begun to expand its presence in the area with three new projects: a Navy base in the port city of Tumaco, Narino department, which will open next month and be assisted by the Army's Counterdrug Brigade; a joint fusion intelligence center in Cali, Valle del Cauca department; and a Coast Guard station in the port city of Bahia Solano, Choco department, where there is already a Marine detachment. Collins referred to this coast as the "ATM" of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) and paramilitary groups because of the easy cash these large, hard-to-detect drug shipments bring. Collins assured the MOD that he would keep Eastern Pacific counter-drug operations a high priority.

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Uribe Focused on Results  
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4. (C) President Uribe expressed concern that unless the amount of drugs reaching the United States goes down and the price goes up, neither his government nor the U.S. will be able to maintain public support. He commented that his administration was running out of time to show results. Collins and Ambassador assured Uribe that recent progress has clearly hurt drug traffickers and impressed the public. Soto added that the Navy has already seized 12 go-fast boats and 23 tons of cocaine this year. Uribe agreed that close cooperation was key to increasing pressure on traffickers. Turning to the recent discovery of drugs aboard Colombia's sail training "tall ship," "La Gloria," in Cartagena, both the President and MOD noted that they are taking immediate action to find and prosecute those responsible. Collins agreed that the event was unfortunate but congratulated Colombia on its decisive response and commitment to full

investigation.  
WOOD